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ABSTRACT

This ethnographic study investigated the process of rule-making in two public kindergarten classrooms in Korea. Two teachers and 38 children, ages 5 and 6 years old, participated. Analyses of observation field notes and videotapes showed teachers making weekly rules for classroom, activity centers, and special activities, using both whole-group discussion and small- and whole-group discussion combined. It was found that rules were the same as norms emphasized by teachers. Characteristics of social constructions between teacher and students were extracted. Although rule making was accomplished by decision-making procedures, it was found inappropriate for children to internalize autonomy and to promote problem-solving abilities. The emphasis of teacher's rule-making was on teacher-initiated instruction; most child-initiated participation came from small group discussion. Based on the results, appropriate procedures and management strategies for developing rule-making were suggested. (JPB)

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An Ethnographic Study on "Rule Making" Activities

in the Kindergarten Classrooms of KOREA

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An Ethnographic Study on "Rule Making" Activities in the Kindergarten Classrooms of Korea

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ABSTRACT

It has been emphasized that we should try to improve autonomy and problem solving abilities in the kindergarten curriculum goals of Korea. Teachers wanted to apply the rule making activity which could positively promote these goals. But the appropriate procedures and ways for promoting these goals have not yet been discussed. The purposes of this study were to investigate the process of rule making in the public kindergarten classrooms of Korea by ethnographic approaches and to suggest the appropriate procedures and management strategies for developing rule making. In order to explore the situations, procedures, content, and social constructions of teacher-children in rule making, participant observations have been conducted in two classrooms during one academic year. Field notes and videotapes obtained by the observation were analyzed through steps.

The results of the analysis were as follows. 1. Rule making of weekly rules was performed regularly on Monday and they were implemented at the teacher's discretion. Rules for activity centers and special activities were also made. Rule making was explained as a significant activity for maintaining pleasant kindergarten life by the teacher. 2. The rule making was performed with two

patterns, 1) whole group discussion and, 2) small and whole group discussion. The regular steps were processed on making rules without remarkable change. 3. The contents of decided rules were the same as norms which were emphasized by teachers everyday. 4. Two characteristics and eleven subcharacteristics of social constructions of rule making were extracted.

Although rule making was accomplished with decision-making procedures, it was found inappropriate for children to internalize autonomy and to promote problem solving abilities. Considerations of democratic rule making procedures were suggested for more effective rule making.

BACKGROUND OF RULE MAKING ACTIVITIES

Improving autonomy to cultivate a democratic attitude has been emphasized in the 4th and 5th Kindergarten curriculum goals in Korea (Ministry of education, 1987; 1992). So in order to achieve that goal, many activities of constructivist education were introduced into the kindergarten classroom. One of these activities, rule making, was applied to the classroom positively for enhancing self-regulation and autonomous decision-making abilities.

A constructivist classroom, which emphasizes social interactions gives children a greater opportunity to develop autonomy and reciprocal relationships with teacher and peers, to engage in cooperation, to think reasonably, and to participate actively (Castle & Rogers, 1993). The object of involving children in rule making is to enhance self-regulation and mutual respect between teacher and children. The specific objectives are to promote a feeling of necessity about rules and fairness, ownership of classroom rules, and shared responsibility (DeVries & Zan, 1994). Experimental studies demonstrated that prosocial behavior and the moral reasoning of children were improved through group discussions on problem situations (Kim, 1993; Liu, 1993).

According to the authors previous interview research (Choi, 1994), most of the teachers in public kindergartens of rural areas conducted rule making with different objectives. In addition to raising autonomy and responsibility, they intend to foster the basic habit and to keep the classroom orderly.

But the real features of rule making activities in classrooms have not yet been examined by qualitative studies in Korea. So it was necessary to use an ethnographic approach which could account for the constructions of teacher-children in social contexts for investigating the hidden curriculum and finding the problems in rule making. Through this study some effective strategies and appropriate procedures could be suggested.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

For this purpose, the following questions were designed.

1. What are the situations and meanings of rule making?
2. How does rule making proceed in the classroom?
3. What are the contents of decided rules?
4. What are the characteristics in the social construction of teacher-children on rule making?
5. What kind of considerations can be suggested for more effective rule making?

METHOD

The subjects of the study were two classrooms with 2 teachers and 38 children (5-6 years of age) in the kindergarten attached public elementary school in a rural area. One of the teachers was a head teacher. Participant observations with video camera recorders and interviews with the teachers and the children were used. For the purposes of this study, visits to the kindergarten were made

one or two days a week during one academic year, except for a 3 month vacation period.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

1. Field notes and videotaped tapes (30-40min × 34 times) were transcribed by the researcher and the two assistants participating in the observation.
2. The transcriptions were analyzed by the researcher through three steps, 1) extracting specific subcharacteristics, 2) classifying similar subcharacteristics, and 3) categorizing classified output according to the research questions. For raising the reliability of the analysis, two research assistants and two subject teachers were asked to reexamine the analyzed descriptive data.

FINDINGS

The findings obtained from the analysis were as follows.

1. General situations and meaning of rule making

Rule making was conducted for enhancing thinking power and internalizing citizenship of the children. In the kindergarten, rule making and promise making were looked upon as having the same meaning. It was explained as a significant activity for maintaining pleasant and orderly kindergarten life by the teachers.

Most of the rule making activities were conducted in three situations, which were 1) classroom weekly rules, 2) rules for activity centers, and 3) rules for special activities.

1) The weekly classroom rules : The main rule making activity

Rule making activity for weekly classroom rules was performed regularly on Monday after one month from the beginning of the school year, and proceeded according to the discretion of the teacher. Teachers instructed when it was needed and how it proceeded.

2) Rules for activity centers

At the beginning of the school year the teacher put the rules which she had decided near the activity centers. But after two or three months, the teacher and children had the time to make rules for the activity centers.

3) Rules for special activities

Sometimes the teacher planned special activities, which were group games, a picnic, field trips, summer camp, and others. Before performing the special activities, teacher gave the children opportunities to make rules that would help in managing the activities smoothly.

2. Rule making procedures

Two patterns of rule making procedures were listed in Table 1. Each teacher made an effort to change the pattern of rule making each semester. All of these rule making activities were performed with two patterns, 1) whole group discussion in the 1st semester and 2) whole group discussion after small group discussion in the 2nd semester.

Insert Table 1 about here

These regular five steps on rule making were processed without remarkable

changes during the 1st and 2nd semesters. But at the end of the 1st semester teacher encouraged the children to think "Why do we need these rules" and "Whether we break the weekly rules or not."

As a result, children of small group discussions in the 2nd semester performed the activity by themselves according to the procedures of the 1st semester. This indicated that children could manage to make the rule as the teacher had directed them previously.

These procedures agree with the rule making procedure as guided by DeVries and Zan(1994). But the actual procedures revealed some problems in cultivating democratic attitudes, due to the fact that it was difficult to find lively discussions and reciprocal interactions throughout the procedures.

There are many reasons for explaining this phenomena. Since 1988, many Korean professors have eagerly introduced constructivism as a theory of instruction. So many teachers recognized the merits of constructivist education theoretically. But there were some incongruences between theory and practice. The essence of constructivism, which emphasized reciprocal relationship between teacher and children, was not in easy harmony with our traditional instruction which emphasized teacher initiative instruction. So when we apply foreign educational theory, we must consider the cultural differences.

3. The contents of decided rules

1) The contents of weekly rules

The contents of weekly rules decided by two classrooms is listed in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

As shown in Table 2, the frequently decided weekly rules were 'use of play

materials well,' 'cleanup well,' 'keep quiet in the classroom, morning meeting,' and 'Attention to the teacher.' These rules were the same as general norms which were emphasized everyday by teachers. But some of the rules decided in small group discussions were different from whole group rules and related with special circumstances. For example, 'Be careful not to catch a cold' and 'Don't tear the work on the bulletin board' were created from children's own experiences. It can be explained that making weekly rules in whole group discussions was so broad that children couldn't make rules for their own necessities. But children in small group discussions reflected their experiences to rules in the context of problems that had occurred.

2) The main contents of rules for each activity center

Block Center

Don't break the block buildings.

Don't take other's play materials.

Language Center

Put the books in order on the bookshelves.

Don't tear the book and don't turn leaves with wet fingers.

Housekeeping Center

Don't throw dolls.

Handle dolls with love.

Dramatic Play Center

Handle dolls carefully.

Play in a friendly manner.

Music Center

Put the musical instruments in their assigned place.

Don't make noise.

Arts Center

Put the used materials in their assigned place.

Don't mix dye stuffs.

Math & Science Center

Don't break off the buds of potatoes.

Don't touch the glass of the magnifying glass.

Manipulative Center

No more than 5 children playing at the same time.

Put the game board in the assigned place.

Outdoor play

Use outdoor materials and equipment in order.

Don't push playmates.

3) The contents of rules for special activities

Picnics

Don't throw trash on the road.

Don't break off buds and flowers of trees.

Summer Camp

Don't cry at night time.

Be careful not to wet the bed at night.

Field Trips

Stand in line to ride the bus.

Don't run in the visiting place.

Special Cooking

Be careful with fire.

Take care not to cut our fingers on a knife.

Group Games

Start after the whistle blows.

Don't break the game rules.

4. The characteristics of social constructions between teacher and children

The characteristics of social constructions between teacher and children in the rule making are listed in Table 3 and 4. Two characteristics reflecting each role were extracted. They were 'teacher initiated instruction' and 'child initiated participation.'

Insert Table 3 about here

. First, Table 3 indicates that the 'teacher initiated instruction' includes six subcharacteristics. Teachers wanted to achieve many objectives through the rule making process. They wanted to teach appropriate attitudes and skills for suggesting, recognizing, and deciding rules. Not only did they stress these objectives, but also taught the language and accounting. But their eagerness to teach these things in a short time prevented their children from having trial and error opportunities.

Insert Table 4 about here

Second, Table 4 indicates that the 'child initiated participation' includes five subcharacteristics. Most of these subcharacteristics were extracted from small group discussions. These show that children participated in their own rule making naturally and actively. They had the chance to experience cooperation, responsibility, initiative, and competition. And they also wrote and drew their own ideas of rules.

SOME CONSIDERATIONS FOR MORE EFFECTIVE RULE MAKING ACTIVITY

- The most important thing is not to conduct rule making formally, but make an effort to internalize autonomy and citizenship to children.
- To achieve manifested goals successfully, the teacher must know the hidden curriculum of rule making activities.
- It is important that children have the opportunity to discuss what the workable and necessary rules are for them.
- Rule making activity is meaningful when it starts in context with children's real problem situations.
- Rule making activity should be managed as an integrated activity.
- Grasping the real meaning of social construction between teacher and children is helpful for the teacher to understand the real activities of the children.
- Teacher must encourage and support children's own rule making.
- For enhancing the rule making activity more actively, conducting rule making in small group discussions is more effective.
- Evaluate the effects of rule making by measuring children's changed rule observance attitudes.
- It is necessary for the teacher to have training in how to apply rule making in the classroom.

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TABLE 1 The Steps of Rule Making

Steps	Whole Group Discussions 1st Semester	Small and whole Group Discussions 2nd Semester
1st Step	Think about the weekly rules	Reflect to keep last week's rules
2nd Step	Suggest, record, and post rules,	Suggest and record rules
3rd Step	Read together posted rules	Present group rules to the whole Classroom
4th Step	Decide rules by majority principle	Decide rules by majority principle
5th Step	Promise to keep the rules	Promise to keep the rules

TABLE 2 Contents of Weekly Rules of Two Classrooms

Whole Group Discussions 1st Semester		Small and whole Group Discussions 2nd Semester	
contents	F	contents	F
Use of play materials well	6	Arrange the private locker well	6
Cleanup well after play	6	Don't run on the floors	6
Play friendly with classmate	5	Be careful not to catch a cold	6
Keep the rest room clean	5	Attention to the teacher	5
Keep quiet in the classroom	4	Keep the rest room clean	3
Keep quiet in the morning meeting	4	Don't tear the work on the bulletin board	3
Attention to the teacher	4	Keep quiet in the classroom	3
Don't mischief the other's chair	2	Keep the classroom clean	3

TABLE 3. Subcharacteristics of Social Constructions in Teacher Initiated Instruction

Teacher Initiated Instruction
1. Appropriate Attitude for Rule Suggestion
2. Arrangement of Suggested Rules
3. Ways and Attitudes of Decision Making
4. Procedures of Rule Making
5. Promise to Keep the Decision Rules
6. Reflection of Keeping the Last Weekly Rules

TABLE 4. Subcharacteristics of Social Constructions in Child Initiated Participation

Child Initiated Participation
1. Help the classmate's presentation in the whole classroom
2. Tell the teacher on children who break the rules
3. Take the role of group leader or group member
4. Record the rule which I suggested for myself
5. Do faster and better than the other groups